

throw me into the fire by GhostGrantaire

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Summary:

“I mean, was it worth it? Was that girl really worth all of this?” His father threw out angrily.

Steve tensed even further. At one point, he knew he would’ve gotten to his feet and defended it all. He would’ve shouted that *yes*, of course Nancy was worth it. Hell, she’d helped him in more ways than he could count. She made him into something, so of course, *of course*, she was worth it.

Now, sitting across from his father without any girlfriend or friend to call later for comfort, he wasn’t so sure.

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Author's Note:

This is 100% a filler piece. I finished it and realized nothing happened, but decided to keep it anyway. Trust me, there will be actual stoncy development coming soon. Right now it's just about Steve.

*I hate to say I told you so
But they love to say they told me so*
-Told You So, Paramore

*Mr. Harrington,
We regret to inform you that your application--*

Steve didn't bother to read anymore. What was the point? He'd expected as much anyways. The application was shit and he knew it. He'd slapped on an essay that Nancy basically told him was shit and submitted it at the last possible minute. How the fuck had he expected this to work out?

He read through the first line again, if only to torture himself just a bit more, before crumbling the paper and slapping it down onto the bed.

"Happy fucking Hanukkah to me," Steve muttered angrily. He pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes for a long moment, focusing on his breathing and forcing himself to stay calm.

"Stephen!" His mother called from downstairs. "Dinner's ready!"

Steve took one last breath and blinked several times before getting to his feet. It was better to just get this over with.

"You what?" John Harrington exclaimed, throwing his fork and knife down. They hit the china with a loud clatter, making his wife flinch and his son tense dangerously. "How did you get rejected from a state

school? I thought you worked hard on that application!”

“I did,” Steve protested, but it went unheard. It was useless anyway.

“I’ve been cutting you some slack lately because I know you’ve been dealing with stuff at school, but now I know that was the wrong call. I mean, what is going on with you? You spend more time getting the shit beat out of you by other kids than studying?”

Steve glared at his plate after that. Like he’d wanted to get his face bashed in by a racist abusive loser. He hadn’t asked for that.

“I mean, god *dammit*, Steve,” John continued angrily. “I saw your last report card. You think we’re supposed to be impressed by all those B’s? Really?”

No, Steve wanted to shout. You should be impressed by all the other shit I’ve done this semester, not that you know anything about that!

“Is this still about that Wheeler girl? I knew that whole thing was trouble, you know, I knew that from the start. When you were together, you goofed off with her nonstop, even lost your friends over her. And now that she dumped you, you’ve just fallen even more off the deep end. It’s not a good excuse, Steven. Not at all.”

Steve bit his lip, teeth digging into the sensitive flesh as he felt his eyes begin to water. He wasn’t crying in front of his dad, no fucking way. Especially not about a girl.

“I mean, was it worth it? Was that girl really worth all of this?” His father threw out angrily.

Steve tensed even further. At one point, he knew he would’ve gotten to his feet and defended it all. He would’ve shouted that *yes*, of course Nancy was worth it. Hell, she’d helped him in more ways than he could count. She made him into something, so of course, *of course*, she was worth it.

Now, sitting across from his father without any girlfriend or friend to call later for comfort, he wasn’t so sure.

“I told you to focus on your studies, and you just... you never listen!

Sometimes you just don't think, Steve." John said, his voice dripping with disappointment and desperation. Steve looked up at his dad, who was shaking his head, eyes fixed angrily on his son. Steve wilted under the look, wondering how his dad, who'd he lost respect for years ago, still managed to make him feel like a piece of shit. "I can't wait to see how you fix this. Because, believe it or not, Stephen, I'm not doing it for you."

Steve swallowed, eyes flickering back down to the table as his father threw his napkin down and got to his feet. He listened to the man storm into the bedroom and slam the door behind him.

It was too quiet after he was gone. When Steve finally got the nerve to look at his mother, she wasn't looking back. Instead her eyes were fixed up on the ceiling as she shook her head softly as if praying for patience.

"Mom?" He asked timidly, trying to gage her emotions.

She looked down at him. Her eyes weren't as angry as her husband's, but there was that same kind of disappointment in them, along with a sense of clarity, like she was seeing the person he'd become for the first time. Mostly she just looked tired.

"Finish your dinner, Steve," she commanded, her voice quiet but still stern. She got to her feet, grabbing her and John's dishes and making her way to the sink. "You can wash your own dish."

That was about as nice as he could've hoped for. What was she going to do, pat him on the back and congratulate him for getting rejected from college and throwing his life away?

Unlikely, but it'd been a nice dream while it had lasted.

He shoved the last few bites of food into his mouth despite his lack of an appetite. Forcing himself to swallow, he waited patiently for his mother to wash her own dishes and exit the kitchen before standing up to do his own. The water was too hot when he stuck his hands under it, but he just flinched and didn't turn it down.

When the plate was clean, he dried it easily and slipped it back into

the cabinet, closing the door gently. He stared at the empty kitchen table for a long moment, and he suddenly felt claustrophobic.

“I’m going to the store,” he said awkwardly, peering into the living room. His mother was sitting beside the lamp, a Christmas issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* held firmly in her hands. Steve didn’t question it.

She didn’t look up. “Don’t be out late.”

He thought about reminding her that school was out for the semester and he had no reason to wake up early in the morning, but he knew it wouldn’t lessen the tension, so he didn’t bother.

“Sure, Mom,” he said softly. “Love you.”

“Love you too,” she responded immediately, her voice just as hard as it had been before. He sighed and slipped out the front door before the silence could linger any longer.

He didn’t actually have anything to buy at the store, so he ended up throwing item after item into his basket as he meandered through the aisles. It was late, and the store was about to close, so he didn’t have to see another soul as he grabbed four packs of Kraft Mac & Cheese, followed by a handful of *Three Musketeers*. At least Dustin would appreciate the effort.

“And a pack of Marlboros too, thanks,” Steve mumbled as he approached the counter, setting down the basket.

“Hi there, Steve,” a familiar voice spoke up across from him, and his head snapped up in surprise.

Joyce Byers was smiling at him, an unsure but still kind expression. He blinked at her in shock before giving a shaky smile back.

“Hi Mrs. Byers,” he greeted unsurely. He felt uncomfortable as she began ringing up his items before placing them in the bag. He didn’t like seeing this woman-- this strong, unbelievable woman who’d

surprised him again and again-- checking him out like this. After a moment, he waved her out of the way, placing the stuff in the bag himself. "Here, I got it. Thanks."

She raised her eyebrows at that, but nodded anyway. She left for a moment to fetch the pack of cigarettes and rang them up quickly as well. "Bit of a nasty habit, huh?"

"I guess," Steve said with a small shrug. He wasn't really sure what else to say to that.

"You ever think about quitting?" She asked lightly, a small motherly smile on her face. She glanced down at the cash register. "Your total is 19.60."

"Oh, I'm not-- addicted, or anything," he said awkwardly as he set down a 20 in front of her.

She gave him a small smile as she gathered his change. There was a twinkle in her eyes like she knew something he didn't, and it made him slightly uncomfortable. "Seems like the perfect time to quit, then."

She was smiling humorously as she handed him the change, and he did his best to mirror it. "Yeah, I guess so."

"Steve, thank you for again taking everything with the kids," Joyce said softly as she handed him the receipt. Her expression was more serious, and Steve felt frozen for a moment before he remembered to take the receipt. She'd thanked him before-- in tears, hugging him gratefully as she'd fussed over his bloodied face-- but it still scared him for reasons he had yet to really identify. "If you ever need anything, you know our address."

Steve nodded dumbly, pocketing the coins and receipt. "Well," he started, giving a stupid grin to try and lighten the tension. "If you ever need a babysitter, give me a call."

It was supposed to be a joke, but Joyce just smiled, a tense but desperate expression, as if she was trying to hold back tears. She laid a hand over his own, which was still resting beside the plastic bag,

and gave it a small squeeze. "I will."

"Well, you probably need to close up, so--" he said after a second.

"Of course," Joyce said with a nod. "Have a good winter break, Steve."

"You too," he replied, which was a stupid thing to say because she was an adult and didn't get a winter break, but she didn't stop smiling.

He tucked the cigarettes into his back pocket and grabbed the bag quickly before she could give any other confession of emotions or grab his hand again and made his way to the door, giving one last wave.

He was in such a rush to leave that he didn't hear the car door slam, and didn't look up until someone called his name.

His head snapped up, eyes blinking rapidly as he struggled to focus on the boy standing a few feet away from him.

"Hi Steve," Jonathan repeated cautiously. He looked frozen to the bone. The plaid shirt pulled over his arms didn't seem to do much to shield from the freezing air. Steve wondered for a moment if he even had working heat in his car.

"Oh shit, hey," Steve said awkwardly, realizing he'd been too quiet for too long. He tightened his grip on the bag, careful to not let it spill and end up embarrassing himself even more. "What are you going here?"

"Picking up my mom," Jonathan said. He hadn't stopped frowning, but there was a nervousness behind his eyes. Steve didn't know why he was so scared. Like Steve was any kind of real threat anyway. "Her car broke down earlier this week."

Steve nodded slowly. "How're, uh, how're you doing? Your family, I mean."

"We're okay." Jonathan replied after a moment's pause which felt far too long.

“Good,” Steve said, surprised to see that he really meant it. He was still dealing with whatever he felt for Jonathan-- not quite blame, not quite envy-- but he was glad Will and Joyce were doing well, especially after everything. He took a breath, nodding towards his car. “I gotta get home.”

It wasn't exactly the kindest of goodbyes, but it would do.

Jonathan nodded, glancing down to his keys before tucking them in his pocket. “Right, see you. Uh, happy Hanukkah.”

“What?” Steve asked immediately, wondering if he'd heard right.

Jonathan looked back at him, confused. “It's Hanukkah, right?”

“Yeah.”

“And... I mean, you're Jewish, right?” Jonathan asked slowly, asking it like he already knew the answer.

“Yeah,” Steve answered again. I just didn't expect you to know that.

“Well... Happy Hanukkah, then,” Jonathan said again, frowning like he wasn't sure why they were talking.

“Thanks,” Steve finally said, finding his voice. “Merry Christmas.”

He gave another nod and turned back to his car. He didn't look back until he was sitting in the driver's seat, turning this ignition. His eyes flickered up to the store window, eyes frozen on the image of Joyce pulling her son into a hug and dropping a kiss to the top of his messy hair. He watched them for a long moment until Jonathan's eyes found his through the glass, and a crease had formed between his eyebrows.

Steve had never driven away faster.

Author's Note:

Man, one of these days maybe I'll stop writing Harrington family drama. When it stops being relatable, maybe.

Happy holidays y'all!!! And a happy New Year if I don't post again until then!